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Hence if the critic deserve the name, justice only will be his infallible guide.

People of sensibility and refinement shrink from controversy; and the enervated and dishonest endeavor to avoid it altogether. But it cannot be escaped without a total withdrawal from the field of action, or an attainment of perfection such as rarely falls to human lot. In the scientific world all the aspects of this question come before us from time to time. We meet the sometimes brutal vigor of German truth-telling, contrasted with the dexterous fencing of French elegance and skill. We meet with inexcusable rashness or misrepresentation on the one hand, and with subservient cowardice or fulsome adulation on the other. In our own country science is none too strong in criticism. With here and there healthy exceptions we have a good deal of paralysis in this direction. In a few quarters the indisposition to accept fair criticism is marked. But there is enough virility in our scientific community to accustom such weak brethren to this one of the phases of "the struggle for existence," by administering more criticism in judicious quantities so long as their cases may seem to require it.

— If the bureaus of the Government would send their return receipt with or in the publications they issue, every one concerned would be greatly accommodated. The return receipts would then be promptly returned, whereas as now sent at another time, it requires time and trouble to identify the package referred to, which sometime results in a failure to return the receipt as desired.

— We are sorry to see our cotemporary *Mind in Nature* admitting to its columns articles like that of Professor Piper on evolution. If the author had spent his time in studying field mice, or garter-snakes, or trout, or minnows, he would have learned to know something of the subject on which he writes so fluently.

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RECENT LITERATURE.

DE CANDOLLE'S *ORIGIN OF CULTIVATED PLANTS.¹—Two years ago the French edition of this book made its appearance, and was favorably received and noticed by the botanical world. It

¹ *International Scientific Series. Origin of Cultivated Plants.* By ALPHONSE DE CANDOLLE, foreign associate of the Academy of Sciences of the Institute of France, foreign member of the Royal Societies of London, Edinburgh and Dublin, of the Academies of St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Berlin, Munich, &c., &c. New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1, 3 and 5 Bond street. 1885, pp. x, 468.

PLATE XXVII.



Capybara, from South America.

was made the text (to some extent) of instructive articles by Gray and Trumbull, which appeared in the *American Journal of Science* during the year 1883, some of the matter of which has been incorporated by the author in the English edition which has now made an appearance. This edition is, therefore, somewhat more than a mere translation, and partakes of the nature of a new edition.

The purpose of the book may be given in the following paragraph in the preface: "I have always aimed at discovering the condition and the habitat of each species before it was cultivated. It was needful to this end to distinguish from among innumerable varieties that which should be regarded as the most ancient and to find out from what quarter of the globe it came. The problem is more difficult than it appears at first sight. In the last century and up to the middle of the present, authors made little account of it, and the most able have contributed to the propagation of erroneous ideas. I believe three out of four of Linnæus' indications of the original home of cultivated plants are incomplete or incorrect."

The book is divided into three parts. In the first we have a general discussion of the epochs of cultivation and of the method of discovering the origin of cultivated species. In the second part plants are taken up systematically and discussed as to their origin. Thus we have first those plants which are cultivated for their subterranean parts, next those cultivated for their stems or leaves, then those cultivated for their flowers or the organs which envelop them, next those cultivated for their fruits, and lastly those for their seeds. In part third we have interesting summaries and conclusions, accompanied with various tables of species.

In all the author has examined 247 species, of which 199 originated in the old world, 45 in the new world, with three whose origin has not yet been determined. "A noteworthy fact is the absence, in some countries, of indigenous cultivated plants. *

* * The United States, in spite of its vast territory which will soon support hundreds of millions of inhabitants, only yields as nutritious plants worth cultivating the Jerusalem artichoke and the gourds;" a statement which apparently overlooks our excellent grapes which are derived from several native species, our blackberries, raspberries and strawberries.

On page 460 we find the remark: "I have not observed the slightest indication of an adaptation to cold. When the cultivation of a species advances towards the north (maize, flax, tobacco, etc.), it is explained by the production of early varieties, which can ripen before the cold season, or by the custom of cultivating in the north in summer the species which in the south are sown in winter." To this we apprehend our horticulturists will not assent. It may be true in the three examples cited, as well as for many others annuals, but what shall we say for the varieties

of the peach, pear and apple, which vary so much in their hardiness? Every fruit grower in the Northern States knows well that certain varieties of these trees will endure the winter while others will not. This may not be due to any adaptation to cold, but it certainly does not admit of the simple explanation given by the learned author. There have certainly been variations in the hardiness of cultivated plants, and these variations have, by judicious selection, made it possible for us to extend very considerably the range of the species.—*Charles E. Bessey.*

OUR LIVING WORLD.—Under this title Mr. Selmar Hess, of New York, is publishing in forty-two quarto numbers a popular work on natural history, which will be welcomed by young people on account of the abundant and showy illustrations.

The text is based on Rev. J. G. Wood's, and is anecdotal rather than scientific; it has been adapted for American readers by Dr. J. B. Holder. The wood-cuts are those which have appeared in Wood's book, also in Brehm's *Thierleben*, while the colored plates are oleographs reproduced by Prang from the exquisite chromo-lithographs of the great work of Brehm.

As a picture book of the animal creation, particularly of the vertebrates, it will prove attractive. The accompanying illustration of that strange animal the Capybara, the "native hog" of South America, the largest of existing rodents, will give an idea of the kind of illustrations used in the numbers we have thus far received. While, then, not specially authoritative or American in its plan or authorship, we doubt not that it will be welcomed by many as a readable "natural history."

As respects the classification adopted, the arrangement should be such as is generally followed by modern zoölogists. To place the marsupials between the land Carnivora and the seals is a violation of the simplest principles of classification. The Insectivora and bats are placed too near the primates, although it should be said that the position of these groups is in dispute.

The work will be issued in forty-two parts of forty-eight pages at fifty cents a part; it will contain forty-two oleographs and eighty-four full-page wood engraving. The paper and press-work are excellent.

MEMOIRS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.—The third volume of the National Academy appeared in 1884 from the Government printing office. It is a quarto volume of 262 pages, and contains four memoirs read before the academy in 1884, under the following titles: Report of the Eclipse expedition to Caroline island, May, 1883; Experimental determination of wavelengths in the invisible prismatic spectrum, by Professor S. P. Langley; On the subsidence of particles in liquids, by Professor W. H. Brewer; On the formation of a deaf variety of the human